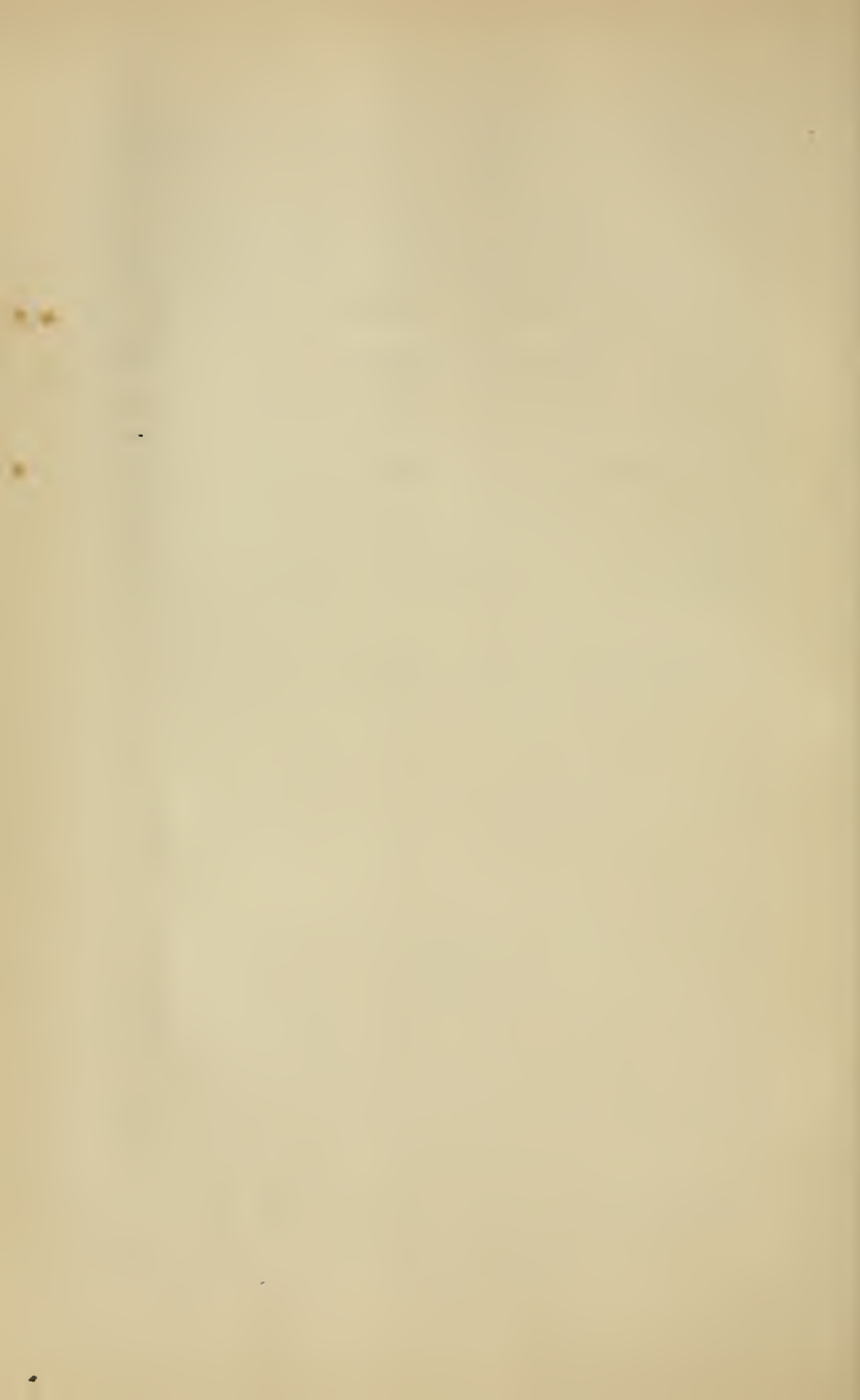




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The Education of the Clergy at the Universities.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

On Commemoration Sunday,

JUNE 11, 1882,

BY

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A Sermon, &c.

MALACHI ii. 7.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

AN old ordinance of the University prescribed that the sermons on the Sunday preceding the first Tuesday in July should be preached by two Doctors of Divinity, with a special preference for those who, during the year, had been admitted to that degree. A change made some ten years ago adapted the letter of that ordinance to its spirit by fixing as the date of this special nomination of preachers that Sunday which has practically become the last in our academic year of residence, the Sunday before Commemoration. However much all the old ceremonies and formalities connected with taking degrees in the higher faculties have been modified and discontinued, I imagine that there still survives in the arrangements of the present day a suggestion that on this occasion there should be some exhibition of the relation in which Theology stands to other studies of the University, or some discussion of its method, condition, and contemporary aspects. And therefore, having been called upon by the Vice-Chancellor this year to perform this public function, I have thought it not inappropriate to bring before the notice of the University the subject of the education of the future clergy of the Church of England in the Universities under existing circumstances.

We cannot disguise from ourselves that we are entering upon a transition era in our academic history. When we assemble again to continue our several duties of study

and education next term, we shall come under the operation of a new legislation, which in many important particulars will change the conditions under which we have hitherto worked. Our social, educational, economic, and religious system will be governed by new enactments, the full force of which none of us, perhaps, can accurately estimate. But in none of these departments of our common life is the alteration introduced more significant than in the religious. The links which bound together the national Church and the University have been almost entirely severed. Headships of Colleges, which have hitherto been held exclusively by clergymen, are now thrown open not only to lay members of the Church of England, but to men of any phase of religious creed, positive or negative. Fellowships of Colleges are in the same way set free from any clerical restrictions, with some slight reservations, in pursuance of which, in some cases one, and in one or two of the larger colleges three, of the Fellows must be persons in Holy Orders, qualified to conduct the services in the College Chapel, and give theological instruction.

The Faculty of Theology alone is in its Professoriate limited to the Church of England, but that is rather owing to the circumstance that the endowment of almost all the theological Professors is supplied by the Canonries of that unique foundation which is at once a Cathedral and a College. So far as endowment is concerned, the Church of England is, with few exceptions, disestablished in the University. For some years past we have had among our students both Churchmen and Dissenters, Christians and non-Christians, such as Jews, Mahomedans, Buddhists. The probability is that in the coming time there may be the same diversity of religious belief in the educating and governing bodies of our different academical societies. It must be admitted, without offence, that an Atheist will have as legal a right as a Theist to hold office as Tutor, or Lecturer, or Professor.

It cannot, therefore, be a subject of surprise that those who are deeply interested in the welfare of the Church of England, and in the success of her mission to supply the spiritual and moral wants of our countrymen, have been profoundly moved by searchings of heart as to whether, under the new order of things, the University will continue to be a fit training-place for the young men who are hereafter to be ordained to be the ministers of that Church. Ever since the Reformation the vast majority of those who have been ordained in the Church of England have been graduates of one of the ancient Universities. There was no absolute legal restriction in England compelling the bishops to confine ordination to those who had pursued a course of University study, as there is in some Continental countries, but as a matter of fact, most Colleges at Oxford and Cambridge became predominantly seminaries for the clergy, the students in law or medicine being comparatively few. The growing necessities of the Church, and the urgent demand for a larger supply of living agents in the work of the ministry taken from among those who had not the means to incur the expense of University education, have led, within the last century, to the erection of many Theological Colleges and clerical training-schools elsewhere; but still, at the present time, about fifty-eight per cent. of those who are ordained in the Church of England have been educated at the ancient Universities, and I think that without forgetting the warning of the old saying, that it is easy to praise Athenians before an Athenian audience, it is not untrue to say that among these are found the most learned, the most accomplished, the most persuasive, the most influential of the clergy. But now men grave, earnest, thoughtful, devout, are asking, with anxious heart, Is the University in its changed form a suitable atmosphere for the education of the future clergyman? Ought he to be trained in a place where the predominant influence around

him is likely to be secular? where there is a chance that he may be brought under the influence of teachers who may, by indirect allusion, if not by avowed assertions, undermine faith in such primary truths as the existence of God the Creator, or the Deity of Christ? Will his devotional life be nurtured and developed, if he is brought under a system where his attendance in the services of his College Chapel is left purely optional, and is practically discouraged by the conspicuous absence of many of his instructors? Will the society in which he moves foster in him the feelings and habits and principles and convictions of the sincere Christian layman, and so secure those moral qualifications which are sought as essential for a good clergyman? How will he fare amid the Babel of religious tongues? How will he become hereafter a loyal office-bearer in the Church of England, if all around he hears her fundamental doctrines questioned, or her ceremonial contemned? How will he stand steadfast in his purpose, if he is accustomed to hear *clerical* scornfully employed as a synonym for unintellectual, and *clericalism* gibbeted as an irreconcilable antithesis to liberalism?

Can we wonder that some, standing face to face with these questions, take the darkest, gloomiest, most melancholy view of the situation, and are tempted to say, All is lost? With a bitter retrospect at the ancient system they cry out, Religion is vanished, Secularism is triumphant, these old Colleges, glorious in historic memories, founded mostly by bishops and ecclesiastics, can no longer be schools of the prophets. Let us depart hence, let us leave the anti-ecclesiastical party in full possession, let us abandon our fair heritage to the spoiler, let us seek a retreat for ourselves elsewhere. Let the Church found for herself new educational institutions, where she may train her children apart from these alien influences. Let the Church, as represented by the clergy, part company with the University.

In the full consciousness of all the difficulties of the present emergency, with the ready acknowledgment that some of the perplexities pressing upon us are no vain phantoms of hysterical alarmists but real dangers, I for one emphatically dissent from the practical conclusions of ecclesiastical pessimism. I do not thus despair of the academic republic. I will not yield to an exaggerated estimate of danger, nor attribute an imaginary perfection and faultlessness to the system which is passing away. When I read of the internal social state of the Universities in the last century and in the beginning of this, I cannot but perceive that there were many agencies at work which exposed the future candidates for Ordination to serious perils, though these were rather moral than intellectual. The University very much reflected the moral and spiritual condition of society without; and with shame we must confess that when the Church at large was dead and conventional in its religion, the Colleges, though intensely ecclesiastical in their constitution, were far from being schools of holiness. Fifty years ago, when a great religious movement began in this University, the educating body came under a powerful impulse, and a deeper spirit of piety and devotion was kindled, which told mightily on those brought within its range, and has certainly issued in sending forth into the Church a more godly, more intelligent, more energetic race of clergy. We have passed at present into a different era. The University now is only a representation in miniature of the religious disruptions and intellectual disintegration of the world without. Whole communities of Christian people have separated themselves into organisations external to the National Church; philosophy and science have broken loose from the control of Christian faith; literary and scientific scepticism have called in question the received doctrine of the Church; and it is inevitable that these intellectual tendencies should force themselves

into the University, and claim a right of existence and expression. How they will ultimately harmonise with the domestic educational system of the Colleges, which has been hitherto the distinctive feature of English University life, I fail to see. But the perils to faith involved in modern University life are, if I read the signs of the times correctly, only the perils of modern society in general. In public schools, in drawing-rooms, in scientific institutes, in periodical literature, we are compelled to meet with open attacks and secret insinuations against Christian doctrine. Unless we close our ears and eyes, we must be exposed to the conflicts of faith. We must submit to the terrible trials of our own day. But, on the fullest consideration of the difficulty, I must confess that it appears to me that it would be a most disastrous thing alike for our Church and our nation, if the future clergy of the Church of England were to be withdrawn from our old Universities. I cannot imagine a more certain way for alienating all the political and social and moral forces of the nation from the wholesome and legitimate influence of the Church as the great organisation of religious life, than the education of the clergy from their childhood in exclusively ecclesiastical seminaries, apart from all association with their lay brethren. They would inevitably grow up narrow, intolerant, one-sided, out of sympathy with the heart and life of the nation, anti-patriotic, disposed to regard the State as a heathen power external to the Church, instead of attempting to leaven it with Christian principles of action. I should dread for our own country the curse of that Ultramontanistic spirit which in Continental Europe has been the most prolific parent of infidelity, and has given birth to that public policy which, under the guise of anti-clericalism, is in reality war against all religion, and is developing an intolerance which, carried to its full issues, would leave no room for freedom of religious thought, or worship, or edu-

cation. It would be most disastrous if the English clergyman were withdrawn in his boyhood and youth from the schools and colleges where he can mingle freely with his fellows, and know the thoughts which are moving all around him, and learn the things which are interesting the nation at large, and enjoy the advantage of a general liberal culture, and be led to appreciate that the sacred literature, to the study of which his life is to be specially devoted, stands in close connexion with other forms of ancient literature, and cannot be understood except in relation to them. If the priest's lips are to keep knowledge, and men are to seek the law at his mouth, then to interpret the law of God, of which he is, the messenger, and shew its application to the actual needs of living, struggling men, he must know something of their intellectual, social, political, moral, spiritual questionings; and this knowledge can only be gained by converse with the masters of thought in their writings, and by the experience of actual contemporary life. It will be poor and stunted knowledge if he is in his period of training restricted to one phase of thought, and one class of men, and one department of study. The English clergyman of past days may have failed in many points, because he has had too little of a distinctively professional education, but at least he has understood, and been in sympathy with, his countrymen.

There has probably been much injustice and harshness inflicted upon the Roman Catholic Church in the German Empire during the struggle between Church and State, which, after raging during the last ten years, now happily shews some sign of abatement and mutual concession; but at least we may sympathise with the desire of the State, that none shall be appointed to ecclesiastical offices who do not give guarantee of having received some liberal culture at a University. Such a restriction has been in operation in the National Churches of such Pro-

testant countries as Scotland and Sweden for many generations.

But while we hold it to be conducive to the best interests alike of the Church and the Nation that the clergy should continue to be educated at the University, we think it more than ever needful to emphasise the recognition of the fact that the particular form of training which the student receives during the earlier part of his career at the University is not, and was never intended to be, distinctly clerical. It is not in any sense of the term professional. It is wholly inadequate as a preparation for the distinctive duties of the ministry. It is only preparatory and introductory. It is necessarily general and disciplinary in its character. It deals with language as the general instrument of thought, or with those abstract principles of number and magnitude which enable us to ascertain the laws of the material universe. So far as theological knowledge goes, our system here only seeks to impart the very scantiest outline of the rudiments of faith and religion. Both the matter and the quality of our present examination would probably admit of considerable improvement. But all who are interested in the well-being of the Church as so intimately dependent upon the efficiency of her ministers, must use every endeavour to impress upon the minds of future candidates for Holy Orders that Classical and Mathematical and Physical studies, though they may minister to, are yet not identical with, Theology; and must urge upon them that before they present themselves for appointment as the religious teachers of their brethren, they must study Christian doctrine systematically, and endeavour to equip themselves for their high office. There must be an earnest reiteration that it is absolutely necessary for the general to be succeeded by the special education, and a full recognition of the fact that it is lamentably presumptuous to suppose that a few weeks will

suffice for the special study. We must recur to the spirit, if not the letter, of the old rule of University studies, that after a course in Arts has been finished, Theology shall be undertaken as a grave and serious department of study. How this shall be secured in the University is a problem which must be faced. It is obvious that not one plan alone will be suitable to our present imperfectly-organised constitution. As our First Public Examination has practically taken the place of the earlier form of the Final Examination for the ordinary degree of B.A., it may in many cases be desirable that young men intended for ordination should then discontinue their more general line of study, and betake themselves to the studies required in the Honour School of Theology.

But then, on the mere principles of fair play and equal toleration, the young men themselves, and their parents, and the Church at large, have a right to demand that the Colleges shall offer all reasonable facilities to those who wish to present themselves in the School of Theology, that they shall put it on the same footing, to say the least, as other non-classical schools, such as Modern History or Mathematics, and so provide adequate Tutors and Lecturers in that department of knowledge, and shall not discourage it by disparagement, or innuendo, or contemptuous comparisons. Others again,—and these it may be hoped will be multiplied,—after pursuing their more general studies for a longer period in relation to other Honour Schools, will betake themselves to the School of Theology as closely connected with their future profession; and no more profitable use could be made of the moneys which, under the new statutable arrangements, are placed at the disposal of the governing bodies of the Colleges than the devotion of a portion of them to Exhibitions, enabling theological students to remain in the University to pursue their special study. Financial difficulties are often the greatest hindrance to those who wish thus to prepare

themselves more effectively for their future profession. I do not, I confess, think it all an improvement that whereas those who attended the lectures of the Professors of Divinity were thirty years ago almost entirely graduates, now nine-tenths of the attendants are undergraduates, most of whom are chiefly engaged on other subjects.

The organised system of the University and the Colleges may do much towards what may be called the more purely intellectual training of the clergy in Theology. The work would be done more efficiently if in each College there were some one Tutor charged with the more special superintendence of those who were destined for ordination, from whom they might derive guidance, suggestion, and encouragement. This would appropriately become the duty of those Fellows or Chaplains who, under the new Statutes, are to be charged with the obligation of giving religious and theological instruction to those undergraduates who belong to the Church of England. It will be a painful abdication of higher opportunities of usefulness if they content themselves with being merely readers of Prayers, or Elementary Lecturers on the Greek Gospels. There rises up before my mind also the vision of the possibility of a larger union of Professors and Tutors who might be brought into more direct personal intercourse with those who are designed for ordination, and might inspire them with a more vivid corporate sense of responsibility, and of the needfulness of adequate preparation for their future life.

I venture further to think that the University need not now feel any jealousy of the Theological Colleges which have been established in various parts of the country during the last forty years. I see no reason why those Colleges should not be regarded as supplementary and auxiliary, rather than as antagonistic. The objections which apply to ecclesiastical seminaries where *the whole course of education* of young men destined for the ministry

is completed do not hold in regard to those institutions which receive students who have previously graduated at the Universities, in order to give them more definite professional training in the theoretical and practical duties of the Christian ministry. The tendency to adopt the precise and possibly one-sided views of the one or two teachers with whom they are brought into the closest personal relation, and even to ape their little peculiarities of manner, and voice, and gesture, are considerably neutralised for those who have been brought up in the wider, freer, more varied life and surroundings of a Public School and a University, whilst signal advantages are gained by many in the formation of a more devout and spiritual frame of mind, and in the realisation of the solemn responsibilities of the office of the Christian pastor, as involving very many more gifts, and graces, and forms of discipline than are required from one who is simply a teacher of Christian doctrine. We are in danger sometimes of forgetting that it is not the most learned theologian who proves the most effective minister of Christ and His Church. Holiness, love of God, love of human souls, are no less requisite than learning; and these, equally with learning, need training and development. The Church will not convert the world from sin to righteousness, which is its main function in a fallen world, except its ministers have been formed by a spiritual as well as an intellectual discipline. And though this spiritual and moral discipline may be attained in the University by those who have a will to profit by many influences around them, which, if honestly sought for, may be found, yet it would be a flagrant disregard of plain facts of experience to deny that Theological Colleges outside the University have contributed largely towards this part of the training of the clergy, and have imparted a rudimentary knowledge of the practical duties of clerical life, which others have had to gain by many

stumbleings and humbling failures in their first years of pastoral work.

Those of us who are resident here are, however, more concerned with the consideration of the conditions which shall best secure that the future candidates for Holy Orders who are sent to the University shall be placed under the circumstances most favourable to their destined career, and be supported by the wisest precautions against the dangers which will inevitably assail them. And this will not be accomplished without the co-operation and good will of all who hold office in the several Colleges. The clerical Fellows are bound to see that the services in the College Chapels shall be so decent and reverent that they shall not repel men of real piety, and shall not by their frigidity or perfunctory performance deaden all devotion, or drive men out to seek more congenial places of worship in some of the neighbouring parish churches. Nor ought opportunities of frequent participation in Holy Communion and of instruction by sermons and addresses to be denied. And in this provision for the spiritual wants of undergraduates, which the clerical Fellows and Chaplains are more particularly bound to make, they ought not in equity to be thwarted and checked by their lay colleagues, even on the supposition that their colleagues are indifferent or alien to the faith and discipline of the English Church. The College Chapel ought at least to be allowed its legitimate functions, and the freest toleration of nonconformity to the old national Church does not carry with it as a corollary an intolerant suppression of the free play of the Church's system in the great homes of education. We may be sure that we shall be acting in accordance with the general sentiment of the great mass of the parents who send their children to Oxford, by allowing free scope for the development of religious beliefs and affections on the basis of a definite Christianity.

All of us also must be prepared fully to recognise the principle that we must rely on free and voluntary organisations of religious influence, as well as on more settled and prescribed forms of discipline. Encouragement in the prosecution of these may be derived from the success which has already crowned efforts in this direction. The wonderful way in which audiences have been attracted to the special Sunday evening sermons addressed to Undergraduates in this church during the two winter terms, the initiation and constant superintendence of which we owe to the energy of one of our Heads of Houses, is a proof that a real want has been satisfied. Informal gatherings for the study of the Greek Testament, which some tutors and parochial incumbents have originated, happily bear witness to the same fact, that voluntary efforts for the religious improvement of young men do not go unrewarded. Amid many causes for gloomy forebodings and despondency there arises up light in the darkness. There is a vigorous life in various charitable and devotional societies; a spirit of missionary zeal, which must rest on sincere convictions of Christian faith, has been kindled, and is manifested in such a fact as that several men have gone out from our midst to preach the faith of Christ to the educated natives of India, or the less civilised tribes of central Africa, under the auspices of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta, or the Universities' Mission to the countries bordering on the Zambesi and the Lake Nyassa; and the cry for help from some of our great centres of semi-civilised heathendom at home is beginning to be answered by the self-sacrificing heroism of some who are willing to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Faith cannot be dead in a society which can chronicle such phenomena in its complex life.

Grave difficulties await all those in the University who love the work and influence of the Church of England,

regarding her as the purest, most comprehensive, and most effective representative of Christianity, and who desire to see her foremost in the development of the religion both of the nation and of the individual. How shall these difficulties be encountered? Not by flying from them, not by abdicating our position and means of usefulness here, not by the wail of despair paralysing action; but by patient, brave, personal effort to leaven the thoughts and studies of those who are brought within the sphere of our influence and teaching with steady Christian principles, equally removed from the silliness of superstition and the cheerless uncertainties of scepticism.

And for the interest of the whole academical society, for the sincere investigation of truth, for the promotion of a general and harmonious increase of knowledge, it were much to be wished that there were no jealousy among the various studies which are pursued in the University. Let each keep to its proper province. Let not Theology look askance on Philology, or Philosophy, or Natural Science; but let these in turn not deny the rightful claim of Theology to interpret the problems connected with the existence of God and the spiritual life of man. Let life and knowledge each react on the other. So in the midst of a changed outward organisation, and with a liberty which rash and inconsiderate men may pervert into licence, the University may continue to send forth a due supply of persons qualified to serve God in Church and State, the twin societies designed for the perfection of man's earthly life.

